



County of Albemarle  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/PLANNING

**MARIAH GLEASON**

[mgleason@albemarle.org](mailto:mgleason@albemarle.org)

Telephone: (434) 296-5832 ext. 3097

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Architectural Review Board  
**FROM:** Mariah Gleason, Senior Planner II  
**RE:** **Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates | Proposed Revisions related to the Entrance Corridor Guidelines**  
**DATE:** September 30, 2025

---

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

[The Rio29 Form-Based Code \(FBC\)](#) was adopted in September 2021 to implement the Rio29 Small Area Plan's (SAP) vision: creating a vibrant, connected, mixed-use community with enhanced public amenities. This optional zoning district allows properties within approximately ¼-mile of the Rio Road/Route 29 intersection to pursue dense, urban development without rezoning.

Unlike traditional zoning districts that focus on land use, the Rio29 FBC emphasizes building form – specifically, the shape, size, location, and design of buildings in relation to streets. Buildings must be positioned close to streets and developments, include attractive and walkable sidewalks, and contribute to a connective bike network.

As anticipated, early development projects to opt in to this code revealed challenges for both staff and developers. In April 2024, the Board of Supervisors authorized comprehensive revisions to address these issues.

While staff initially focused on text edits, conversations with property owners and the development community – combined with the County's Zoning Modernization effort – made it clear that more significant changes were necessary. As a result, the code has been substantially revised in three key ways: formatting, regulatory language, and the character area map.

The character area map identifies activity centers within the Rio29 FBC district and varying development intensity. Activity centers, or “core character areas,” having the highest development intensity, were revised to separate pedestrian-focused destinations from high-speed vehicular corridors. This approach creates safer, more pleasant pedestrian experiences while preserving the primary vehicular functions of Rio Road and Route 29.

We have recently shared the proposed code changes with the community through meetings and a [project website](#). The Planning Commission (PC) will review the proposed revisions in a work session on Tuesday, November 18th and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) will do the same on Wednesday, December 10th.

**PROPOSED REVISIONS**

When the Rio29 FBC was established, Entrance Corridor (EC) Guidelines were integrated into the code's requirements and a County-wide Certificate of Appropriateness category was added for EC developments opting into the code. This enables administrative review for all projects in the FBC district. Staff would like to update the ARB on the proposed code changes that are directly related to the EC guidelines. Staff will share the ARB's comments on these changes with the PC and BOS.

1. **[Sec. 20.C.10] Architecture.**
  - a. Clarified that certificates of appropriateness are only required for properties within the EC overlay district. The current code requires every property under the Rio29 FBC to obtain a certificate of appropriateness, regardless of their location.
  - b. Added standards for glass in windows and doors to satisfy minimum façade fenestration requirements. These standards align with EC Guidelines.

- c. Revised requirements to only permit outdoor storage of materials when not visible from public rights-of-way (Sec. 20C.6.C.2.b).
  - d. Revised Table 14: Building Façade Materials to more clearly differentiate between permitted and prohibited materials and provided a quantifiable limitation (no more than 15% of the façade) for materials that can only be used in limited amounts as accents.
  - e. Added sign requirements linking standards to Section 4.15 and prohibiting temporary sidewalk signs from placement in sidewalk clear zones (unobstructed 6-foot width) or in street tree wells that are not covered with hard grates.
2. **[Sec. 20C.11] Landscaping and Lighting.**
- a. Generally consolidated and clarified landscaping and lighting requirements to avoid potentially conflicting requirements and address known gaps.
  - b. Added standard that all required trees and shrubs must be selected from the Albemarle County Plant List.
  - c. Added a requirement for a plant health note to be included on landscaping plans, in alignment with the EC guidelines: “Trees and shrubs will be allowed to reach, and be maintained at, mature height. Pruning will be minimal and only to support the overall health of the plant. The topping of trees is prohibited.”
  - d. Landscaping along streets.
    - i. Revised street tree standards to better align required tree types and spacing with compact, urban street designs. Except for along Rt. 29, street tree planting size has been revised from large trees, 50-70’ tall at maturity, to species growing to 20-50’ tall at maturity. Revised standards are informed by street tree standards in more urban Virginia localities. See excerpts below for comparison.

**Current Requirement**

	Through corridor	Boulevard	Avenue	Local street
Landscaping requirements	Large shade trees must be at least 3 inches caliper (measured 6 inches above the ground). The maximum average distance between trees must be 50 feet or less per block length.	Large shade trees at least 2½ inches caliper (measured 6 inches above the ground). The maximum average distance between trees must be 50 feet or less per block length.	Large trees at least 2½ inches caliper (measured 6 inches above the ground). The maximum average distance between trees must be 40 feet or less per block length.	Large or medium trees at least 2 inches caliper (measured 6 inches above the ground). The maximum average distance between trees must be 50 feet or less per block length.

**Proposed Revision**

Street Type	Street tree requirements		
	Tree type	Planting size (measured 6 inches above the ground)	Spacing (maximum average distance between trees, per block length)
<b>Destination Street</b>	Medium, small, or ornamental trees <sup>1</sup>	At least 2½ inches caliper	30 feet or less
<b>Avenue</b>	Medium, small, or ornamental trees	At least 2½ inches caliper	30 feet or less
<b>Boulevard</b>	Medium or small deciduous trees	At least 2½ inches caliper	30 feet or less
<b>Local Street</b>	Medium or small deciduous trees	At least 2½ inches caliper	30 feet or less
<b>Through corridor</b>	Large deciduous trees <sup>2</sup>	At least 3½ inches caliper	40 feet or less
<b>Service Street</b>	None		

<sup>1</sup> Street trees must be located in tree wells, or similar feature, with grates.  
<sup>2</sup> Flowering ornamental trees must be interspersed among required large shade trees. The ornamental trees need not alternate one for one with the large shade trees. They may be planted among the large shade trees in a less regular spacing pattern.

- e. Landscaping of off-street surface parking.
    - i. Added requirement for shrubs to be planted along the perimeters of off-street surface parking areas that abut public roads. Standards require shrubs that are a minimum of 24 inches in height at planting, spaced to form a hedge.
    - ii. Removed requirement that parking lot perimeters trees must be large deciduous tree types (50-70 feet in height at maturity). Planting size and spacing have not changed.
    - iii. Added requirement for 12% tree canopy in off-street surface parking areas. Perimeter trees cannot be used to meeting this requirement.
  - f. Lighting.
    - i. Added standard prohibiting light levels greater than 20 footcandles at the ground.
    - ii. Reduced the requirement for full cutoff fixtures from 3,000 lumens to 1,600 lumens.
    - iii. Pedestrian lighting (lighting along sidewalks within rights-of-way).
      - 1. Added standards for pedestrian lighting to address safety and continuity issues.
      - 2. Reduced maximum mounting heights of pedestrian lights on Destination, Avenue, and Local street types to 15 feet. Corresponding heights on Rio Rd. and Rt. 29 remain at 20 feet.
    - iv. Clarified the maximum light fixture color temperature is 3,000 Kelvin.
3. **[Sec. 20C.5.D.2] Streets. Primary street.** Added street hierarchy standards to identify the primary street toward which parcels, developments, or buildings must be oriented. This regulation ensures consistent building placement and design along higher-ranking streets. The proposed street hierarchy is:

Rank (1 = highest)	Street Type (* denotes ECs)
1	Destination Street ( <i>none at this time</i> )
2	Avenue ( <i>Berkmar and Hillsdale Drives</i> )
3	Boulevard ( <i>*Rio Road</i> )
4	Local Street ( <i>other streets</i> )
5	Through Corridor ( <i>*Route 29</i> ) or Service Street

- 4. **[Sec. 20C.8.C.3] Building Form. Building entrances facing primary street.** Added provision requiring primary building entrances to face the primary street frontage, if the building is within 35 feet of a street.
- 5. **[Sec. 20C.9.H.2-3] Parking. Dumpster pads and loading areas.**
  - a. Added screening requirement for dumpster pads.
  - b. Added minimum loading space requirements for certain uses. Included screening requirements.
- 6. **[Attachment 2] Rio29 Form-Based Code Character Area Map.** The core character area was shifted from the vehicular-focused Rio Road/Route 29 intersection to three (3) existing shopping centers where a density of commercial activity is already present - Rio Hill Shopping Center, Albemarle Square, and Fashion Square Mall.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the ARB approve the proposed revisions to ZTA20240001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates, contained in Attachments 1 and 2.

**Possible Motions:**

I move that ARB approve the proposed revisions to ZTA20240001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates, contained in Attachments 1 and 2.

I move that ARB approve the proposed revisions to ZTA20240001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates, contained in Attachments 1 and 2, amended as follows (state amendments).

**ATTACHMENTS**

**Attach. 1:** [ZTA-2024-00001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates – 2025-09-18 Rio29 Form-Based Code - Proposed Changes](#)

**Attach. 2:** [ZTA-2024-00001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates – 2025-09-12 Rio29 Form-Based Code Map – Proposed Changes](#)

**Attach. 3:** [ZTA-2024-00001 Rio29 Form-Based Code Updates – Current Rio29 Form-Based Code Map, adopted 2021](#)